

Aquatic Park Stop

#4 Swimmers in the Bay

What do you do for fun? Do you have places near your home where you go to relax or exercise? Most of the swimmers in San Francisco Bay are not professional athletes, but ordinary citizens out for exercise and recreation in the place where they live. The public of San Francisco fought for over 70 years to have a safe beach built within the city limits; a place where people, not industry, had the rights to the waterfront.

Shortly after the 1849 gold rush the San Francisco waterfront was consumed by industrial factories and businesses. In 1849 there were no bridges, cars, or airplanes allowing people to easily escape the city. People lived and played where they worked. The people of San Francisco desired a safe place in the city to enjoy the recreation opportunities provided by the San Francisco Bay.

Unfortunately, though thousands of people swam in the Bay each year, the San Francisco waterfront was considered too profitable economically to be set aside for a purpose like recreation. The rights of the people were in conflict with colossal opponents in industry and politics. However, in time the perseverance, passionate lobbying, and the continued hope of the citizens of San Francisco won out.

After close to 70 years of lobbying, in 1935, construction was finally begun on what would be known as San Francisco's Aquatic Park. Near its completion project managers declared: "The finished park...fills completely the need for a central water playground. Here one may bathe, swim, canoe, or sail... and revel in the beauties spread before them."

Today, the swimmers at Aquatic Park continue to enjoy the legacy of an earlier time. While generations have passed, Aquatic Park, now managed by the National Park Service, remains a place where the people of San Francisco can safely enjoy the recreation opportunities available to them in their own back yard.